



Fizzy fun

New 'Fizzy Fruit Salad' ruffled pansy mix from **PanAmerican Seed** is a Cool Season Thrivers selection. The mix includes new grape and lemonberry colors, plus passionfruit and raspberry. The pansies are hardy to -10°F and grow 6 to 8 in. tall by 8 to 10 in. wide, in sun or shade. PanAmSeed.com

Super hero

Monrovia's new 'Green Hornet' Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii* 'Grhozam') is compact and low-growing, featuring emerald green foliage with teal blue undersides. Its orange-gold fall color works well when defining a walkway or as a mass planting in a larger area of the garden. The dwarf shrub thrives in full sun in Zones 4 to 8. It grows to about 1.5 ft. tall and 3 ft. wide, and is suitable for firescaping.



Monrovia.com

Aquatic beauty

Nymphaea 'Bimini Twist,' available from **Florida Aquatic Nurseries**, was recently honored by the International Waterlily and Water Garden Societies as the Best New Tropical Waterlily for 2010 and the Second Best Overall Waterlily from more than 30 entries in the contest. This tropical waterlily hybrid features a purple flower and lime green/deep merlot mottled pads. The lily will be available in limited numbers for 2012. FloridaAquatic.com



Candy color

The Bonfire begonia series now includes the Choc Pink (pictured) and Choc Red varieties, featuring dark "chocolate," serrated foliage. Developed by New Zealand Plant and Food Research and managed by **Tesselaar Plants**, Choc Pink and Choc Red are now sold through the **Ball Horticultural Co.** network as part of the Selecta First Class series. Both offer a full, upright to mounding habit, plus red-orange or blush pink blooms that cover up to half of the plant — from late spring to late fall. The low-maintenance, heat- and drought-tolerant plants can be grown in full sun or partial shade. Tesselaar.com, Ballhort.com



White delight

David Austin Roses' *Rosa* 'Susan Williams-Ellis' (Ausquirk) features about 135 petals, and flowers two to three weeks before most roses do. It then continues to bloom nearly non-stop until the harder frosts, according to its breeder. The fragrance is strong and "old rose" in character. It is best suited to USDA zones 4 to 8, and grows to approximately 4x3 ft. DavidAustinRoses.com



THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kkehoe@questex.com.

Give new customers a pricing incentive

There are some signs that prices are stabilizing, but until the real estate cycle turns up, commercial inventories are worked through and vacancies are filled, pricing is not going to return to 2007 levels anytime soon. Given this, it pays to use incremental pricing to compete effectively for new business.

1 START. Using your 2010 P&L statement, determine your monthly contract billings, which for our example is \$140,000. Calculate the contract portfolio earn rate (divide total revenues by total labor hours to do the work: \$25.75). Then, calculate the enhancement percentage (enhancement revenues divided by contract revenues: 19%), and determine the enhancement gross margin percentage (45% in our example).

2 STRATEGY. In our example, we assume an 85% renewal rate — and this adjusts monthly contract billings to project renewal revenue and gross profit. Because we are still earning \$25.75 per hour, with an average wage rate of \$12.50 for the hours worked, we will earn 51.5% on this book of business.

Next, we model incremental new contract revenue of \$500,000. These we anticipate will sell

The key to lower incremental pricing is ... to grow your overhead at **less than 50% of your sales growth.**



at an average discount of 10% less than the \$25.75 to which we are accustomed. As a result, we will earn less on this new work: only \$23.18 per hour. In reality, of course, it is likely we will sell some jobs for higher than this rate and some lower to achieve this average. As a result, we plan to accept a lower gross margin of 46.1%.

WEB EXTRA For a chart showing more on pricing new work competitively, visit www.landscapemanagement.net/kehoechart1.

We are not happy about this, but we risk selling far less at higher rates. That would create an even greater problem: not covering overhead.

Finally, we estimate enhancement revenue. In this example, we are conservative in projecting the same 19% of contract revenue at a 45% gross margin. In addition, we make an assumption of an allowable overhead growth of 10%. This will be required to fund the additional equipment costs that come with adding new contracts.

3 RESULT. The effects of the strategy: 85% renewal, new revenue of \$500,000 at 10% less price and enhancements holding steady at 2010 levels, gives us a P&L projection of \$140,366 and 6.1% in net profit. Therefore, despite the gross margin declining from 50% to 49.2%, we make more money.

The key to lower incremental pricing is — and must be, in my experience — to grow your overhead at less than 50% of your sales growth. In this case, we accomplish that mission — as well as making it more likely that we will be competitive in pricing new work.

ILLUSTRATION BY: STOCK INTERNATIONAL INC.

LM REPORTS

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

LAWN CARE: SPRAYERS & SPREADERS

Earthway Products

The new S15 Spray-Pro ground driven push sprayer is designed for spraying all types of liquids, including ice control products, pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers. The S15 is a fully assembled, smaller version of the S25 Spray-Pro Mark III and includes an adjustable spray system that makes applications on sidewalks and parking lots easy to manage. Use it on lawns, driveways, paths and any area boom sprayers will not go. Earthway.com



Grasshopper

Shielded sprayers apply a constant, accurate balance of small droplets that "stick" to vegetation, achieving greater coverage with less chemical use. The unit can cover up to 5.5 acres (240,000 sq. ft.) with one tank. Independent floating chambers follow the ground contours for precise application, and zero-turning-radius maneuverability is maintained, even in tight spaces. The sprayer implement also provides operators quick and easy mounting, removal and storage. Available in 53- (pictured) or 133-in. widths and 30-gal. capacities, shielded sprayers are compatible with Grasshopper's full line of FrontMount and MidMount power units. Grasshoppermower.com

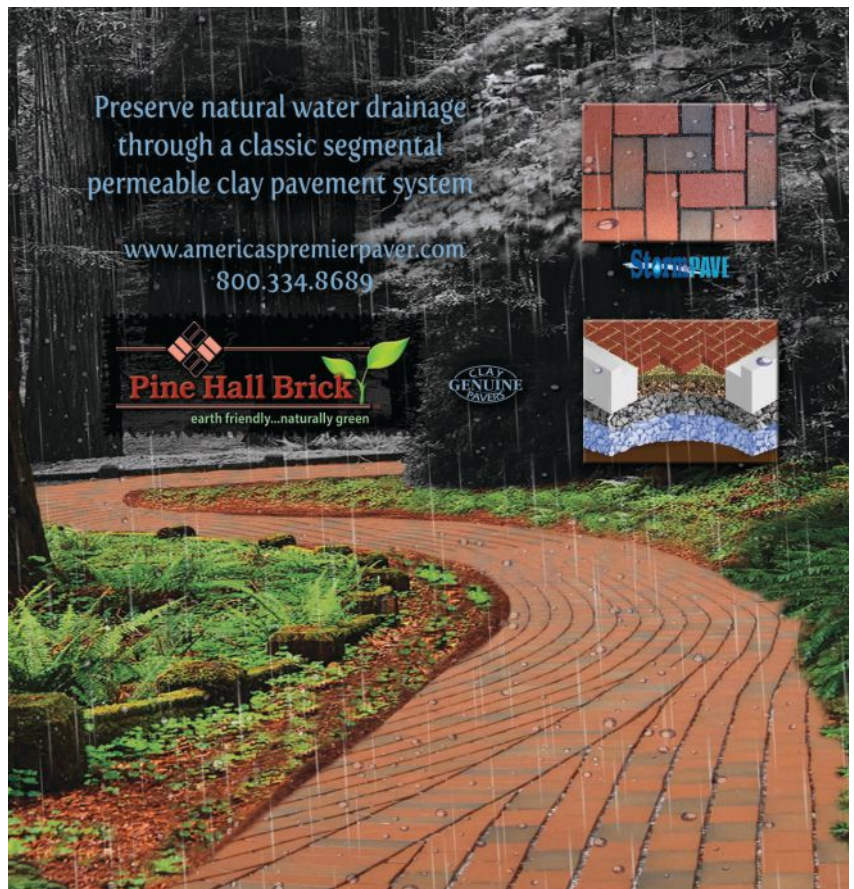


TurfEx

Intended for use with tractors and utility vehicles, the new 7-cu.-ft.-capacity TS700GR and 12-cu.-ft.-capacity TS1200GR ground-drive spreaders are designed to exert less impact on surfaces than similar tow-behind models. Constructed of heavy-duty polyethylene to reduce corrosion and maintenance concerns, the units are up to 40% lighter than other models. The design helps lessen fuel consumption for the towing vehicle. The spreaders feature large flotation tires to further minimize impact on delicate surfaces. Spread width is infinitely variable up to 30 ft. Trynexusfactory.com

Curtis Industries

The new, 500-lb.-capacity Sno-Pro Fast-Cast 550E electric V-box spreader is lightweight, featuring a stainless steel carriage and a rustproof aluminum hopper. It features a 12V, 1/3-hp electric motor that draws less than 20 amps, replacing a gas engine — eliminating fuel costs and serving as a "green" alternative. It also eliminates the need for a noisy vibrator motor, allowing operators to work without disturbing customers or neighbors. The spreading range is from one to 24 ft. It also offers adjustable material deflectors and an in-cab control panel. Options include a weather cover and a top screen. Curtisindustries.net



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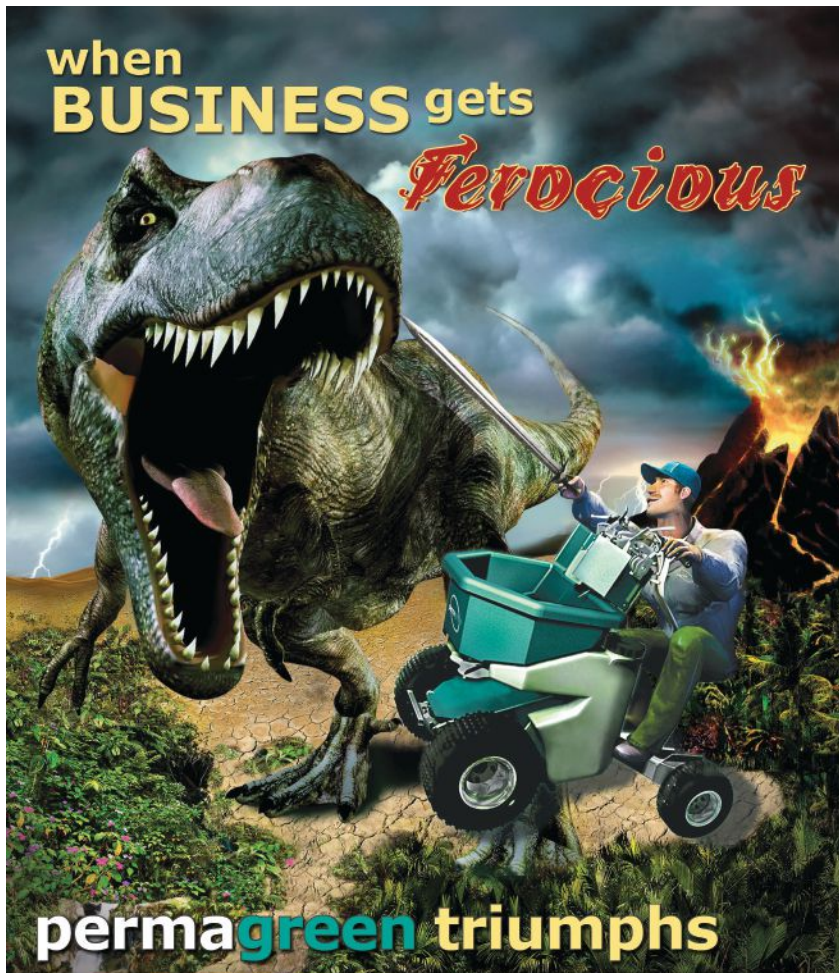
StormDRIVE

MAINTENANCE: ENGINES



Subaru

Featuring a vertical shaft configuration, the new EA190V engine is the first to offer chain-driven overhead cam (OHC) technology to the small, air-cooled, vertical shaft engine market. The 189cc displacement engine is designed to be lightweight, yet durable and rugged enough for a variety of lawn and garden equipment — including pressure washers, walk-behind string trimmers, aerators and lawn vacuums. The EA190V offers both easy starts in cold weather and superior cooling, making it ideal for multi-seasonal equipment. Subarupower.com



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Honda

Featuring six models, the V-Twin engine line offers power, versatility and fuel economy in a compact package. The new GX630, GX660, GX690, GXV630, GXV660 and GXV690 engines are available in both horizontal and vertical shaft configurations. They have been designed to offer low noise, vibration and exhaust emissions without the use of a catalyst. Features include the hemispherical combustion chamber design, higher compression ratio, increased displacement and steel connecting rods. An integrated cylinder and head eliminates the need for a head gasket, which results in increased cooling and higher levels of reliability. Honda.com

Kohler

The Courage XT-7 vertical-shaft, 4.5-net-hp utility engine powers various equipment. The engine comes standard with an overhead valve design, a cast iron cylinder bore and flywheel ball bearing. A wide variety of options allow the engine to be customized to fit the application, straight or tapered PTO shafts, SAE pump mounting, engine-mounted controls, front or side-discharge muffler, fixed or 6-position indexable recoil, bottom or side oil drain, paper or foam-only air cleaner, debris screen, and recoil or electric start. The engine is certified for current EPA and CARB emissions standards and meets or exceeds Society of Automotive Engineers Small Engine Test Code J1940 horsepower requirements. Kohler.com



MAINTENANCE:
CONSUMABLES

VP Racing Fuels

SEF 94 Small Engine Fuel is designed to combat ethanol-related problems in chain saws, blowers, lawnmowers and other portable gasoline-powered equipment. SEF94 is available in quart-size containers to meet virtually any manufacturer specifications: an unleaded gasoline for 4-cycle engines and two versions pre-mixed with oil (40:1 and 50:1) for 2-cycle devices. Each blend is "ready-to-use," with the 2-cycle Pre-Mix versions. SEF94 is also available in 5-gal. pails, and 30- and 54-gal. drums. The 4-cycle version can be used in 2-cycle engines when mixed with oil to manufacturer's specifications. SEFfuels.com



Shindaiwa

New Red Armor engine oil is designed for use in all air-cooled two and two/four-stroke engines. It begins removing performance-robbing carbon deposits with the first use. The special formula removes the building blocks for varnish, and prevents varnish from sticking to the hot engine surfaces — where it can transform into hard carbon deposits. Available in 2.6-, 6.4- and 13-fl.-oz. sizes, as well as 1-gal. size. It is JASO FD and ISO LEGLD rated, the highest two-stroke oil rating available. Redarmoroil.com

Stens

The GB brand line of bars and sprockets feature the Pro Top and Titanium Pro Top bars, as well as a new line of Arbor Tech and Arbor Pro bars, which come with a solid steel bar and replaceable tips that guarantee high quality and extended bar life. Additionally, GB sprockets are available in Center Drive, Rim and Pro Spur varieties. Stens.com



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MYBIGGESTMISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



Sliding payments from clients plus sliding payments to vendors equals a cash flow crisis for Florida's Dickerson Landscaping.

EARLY ON DURING his company startup in the late 1980s, William Dickerson scored a large stadium project. The work was highly recognizable and profitable — a boost in business for Tallahassee, FL-based Dickerson Landscaping.

The problem? Dickerson was told he'd be paid when the general contractor on the project got his work done. But Dickerson's work, which included some wetland, tree and sod plantings and ground-cover and shrub installation around the stadium, didn't take nearly as long as the overseeing contractor's work. "We had already bought plant material, paid for labor and had everything lined up. This created some issues when we had to tell our vendors we didn't have the cash flow available to pay them."

A vicious circle ensued.

The lessons Dickerson learned were three-fold.

First, his big mistake was letting clients slide on making payments or not being prepared for a drawn-out payment schedule.

The resolution to this challenge was keeping lines of communication open with customers. For example, Dickerson was working with a large residential builder and started to notice his payments were coming in further and further apart. "It was a red flag since the builder was

previously paying on time," he says. "At first, I just assumed it was a reliable company and they were good for the money, but as payments got more and more stretched out, I had to address it."

In this case, Dickerson had to pull the plug, and he did it just in time, without getting burned and losing what was owed to him. Talking about payment terms with the client up front and having something in writing to solidify the agreement is crucial to managing cash flow. "The idea is to get that information in writing," says Dickerson, adding that many larger commercial customers pay every 15 or 30 days, so a problem can be quickly recognized as payments linger beyond 60 and 90 days. "Then if the rules of the game start to change, you can address it. Ask why you aren't being paid on time and bring out the agreement."

Dickerson says discussing the "rules of the game" early on takes the awkwardness and emotion out of what could be difficult conversations about money owed in the long run since the terms of the contract were already openly discussed and agreed upon from the get-go.

Second, Dickerson learned to "be up-front with vendors about the situation you're in. Let them know what rules the controlling

contractor on a project has put in place so they're aware if you won't be paying them right away. Don't tell them at the last minute the money isn't available."

In fact, this can actually be to your benefit, Dickerson adds. "Some vendors will be more willing to work with you and maybe even waive the finance fee if you're upfront about the payment schedule," he explains.

This same upfront approach can be used with banks, especially in a time when it can be hard to secure a loan. "Take your signed contract for that job to the bank and tell them you need a line of credit to work within the perimeters of that specific project," Dickerson suggests. "It's an easy way to prove you'll be getting the money, but you just need some cash flow to get started."

While Dickerson learned many lessons here, there was one important point realized above all else: "Money has no friends."

"Money is an item that is purely economic," he says. "It goes from point A to point B and doesn't choose friends. In the end, it's often the squeaky wheel that gets the grease."

Bottom line? You need to be the first one calling when you're not getting paid, says Dickerson. "Solicit advice from your CPA and industry peers and pay close attention to balance sheets," he advises. "And if red flags continue to come up, it might be time to get out."

Payton is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.



William Dickerson

COMPANY:

Dickerson Landscaping

PRESIDENT: William Dickerson

HEADQUARTERS:

Tallahassee, FL

FOUNDED: 1987

EMPLOYEES: 14-25

SERVICE MIX: 45% hardscape, 18% maintenance, 15% landscaping, 12% sod, 5% water features, 5% design

CLIENT MIX: Hardscaping: 80% residential/20% commercial; maintenance: 60% residential/40% commercial

2010 REVENUE: \$750,000

2011 REVENUE (EST.): \$875,000

WEB: www.dickersonlandscaping.com

BEST ADVICE: Discuss terms with clients up front; don't let payments slide; communicate with vendors. "The squeaky wheel gets the grease."

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